

Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
St. Mark 10:2-16

Genesis 2:18-24

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ¹⁹So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

²³Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken."

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Mark 10:2-16

²Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." ⁵But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The world was young by all indications. In any event, it has gotten older since the time we read about in the first lesson this morning. As we look in on Paradise, God has been busy. He has created everything in seven days and all of it has been good. He created light and the scripture reads, "He saw that the light was good." He saw that the water was good, and the land was good. Same with plants and animals.

In the first chapter of Genesis the word "good" is used six times - and "very good" is used once.

So it is worth noting how this morning's reading begins in Genesis 2:18. "The LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone...'"

The Bible begins and after uninterrupted goodness throughout all creation...we have here identified the first evil: loneliness.

God does not say, "The man needs something to eat." He doesn't need clothes to wear. He doesn't need something to live in and keep the rain off of him. The man needs someone to be with him.

"It is not good that the man should be alone..."

God knows how people are made. God knows the primary need of people in creation and he has identified it first. It is not good to be alone.

People value themselves by how valuable they are to others. When people know they have made an impact on other lives - that's when they feel important.

And the pain we see...pain in our own lives or pain in someone else's life...that pain is often caused by loneliness, or the fear of it.

People want others to approve of them. People want others to agree with them. People live always evaluating themselves by the response of other people. Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't need anyone else. I don't care if people like me or not." And then they will repeat it, and you begin to wonder why they are so anxious for people to know they don't care if they really don't care.

It's never enough to be right. Everyone has to know we are right. That's why we're always telling them.

It's never enough to be sure of anything. Everyone else has to agree. That's why we're always arguing.

We spend so much time and energy - not on what we do or think or say - but on how what we do or think of say affects other people.

So, people usually spend more time explaining themselves and their behavior than they spend thinking about how they will act in the first place. Because people are generally concerned with how others feel about them, and what influence they have on other lives.

We want to be understood. We want to be agreed with. We want to be approved of.

God knows how people are made. He made us himself. So, the first bad thing God identified in all creation; "The LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.'"

People fear being alone. They should. That's not the way we were made. "It is not good..."

We want to learn how to be together. We see the wisdom of our wise people as they give us instruction on how to live together. We look to the Bible which repeats the theme. The Bible tells us how to share. The Bible repeats constantly the instruction on how to respect each other. The Bible teaches us how to encourage one another, how to pray for each other.

We call it a Holy Book. That book is giving us instructions for being together. It gives us instructions for avoiding evil and evil comes in the form of things that separate us from each other.

Anger, selfishness, fear. All of those things separate us from one another.

Possibly the greatest part of the tragedy...the worst part of this evil that keeps us from being together as God wants...*is that the sin of separation strikes first at the people who are closest.*

We are never just angry alone. We are never just selfish alone. There are always targets of our anger or selfishness. And it will usually be the people who are closest.

So, this morning's Gospel lesson brings the teachings of Jesus about how we live as husbands and wives and how we live with children. The people who are closest to us. The ones we see all the time. The first people to be blamed when things go wrong. The closest people at hand when we get angry. Jesus tells us to take special precautions about these.

Because when sinful people look for a target...it is usually family that is closest. And we are all sinful people.

Maybe we count on our families the most. Maybe that's why we are so likely to behave so badly with family. We count on family members to understand us. They are the ones we expect to appreciate what we do, to know what we are thinking, to share our values.

Our families are the ones we are counting on to keep us from being alone. And God said it is not good for us to be alone.

So we see the tragedy played out time after time. Family members, those closest to each other, the people who keep each other from being alone. Turn on each other in anger. Separation turns to separation. Anger feeds on anger and it grows. Families, husbands and wives; parents and children; brothers and sisters spend their time and energy in anger and causing pain for one another.

It grows. It expands to others in the community. It expands to entire races of people, economic classes. There is no limit to how many people we can separate ourselves from.

But we start with whomever is close.

In a perverse way, it proves what God said from the beginning. It is not good to live alone.

When we are threatened with loneliness, the reaction can be horrible. We perceive someone is being selfish. We feel someone's anger toward us. We think someone dislikes us. We think someone disapproves.

We react with anger and rejection of our own. Revenge. Think of hateful things to say. Plan ways to hurt feelings. Craft things to tell others in gossip.

Humanity spends an awful lot of time and creativity and energy in separating people from people. This results, of course, in people being alone. "It is not good that people should be alone."

May I offer a solution? Every time this is tried it works. Every time. (It doesn't always work, but that is because it is not really tried. If we really do this, we will build ourselves together. And we will live like God created us to live.)

Know you are not alone. That's it. That's the solution. Since anger and selfishness is caused by the fear of being alone or the perception that you have been left alone and rejected...and that, in turn, causes people to be more angry and selfish...

Here's the solution. Realize that you are not alone. Even when your family does not appreciate you. (And they often don't.) Even when no one knows how hard you work. (And no one does.) Even when you are unfairly criticized. (and you are.) Even when no one is interested in hearing about how carefully you have analyzed a problem...Don't get angry, or feel rejected. You are still not threatened with being alone.

God came to you. God became Jesus Christ and came into our lives. Every minute of everyday, the living Christ is living with you. God is here. You are not alone. There is one who knows you. Knows how hard you work and how careful you are about what you do.

There is one who knows what you are hoping to do with your life. One who understands and encourages you. Appreciates you. Forgives you.

Don't feel alone and turn on people in anger.

Feel Jesus Christ alive in you - and then turn to people.

Let them know you know them. Try to understand them, appreciate them. Encourage them...forgive them.

When you know Christ is in you, others will know Christ is in you. They will know they are not alone.

Jesus Christ intervenes if we will let him. Jesus Christ is alive and living in you right now. The separation ends.

Live with those people around you. Show them what Jesus has shown you. God looks out of your eyes and says "It is not good for them to live alone." Show them they are not alone. Show the world God's love.